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UNHCR ACTIVITIES FINANCED BY VOLUNTARY FUNDS: REPORT FOR 1993-1994 AND PROPOSED PROGRAMMES AND BUDGET FOR 1995

PART IV. THE AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN

Section 7 - Other Countries in Central America

(submitted by the High Commissioner)

GE.94-03339

IV.7 OTHER COUNTRIES IN CENTRAL AMERICA

1. This chapter covers UNHCR activities in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

Area Overview

Characteristics of the refugee population

2. The majority of refugees in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama are of Nicaraguan, Salvadorian and Guatemalan origin. There are, however, significant numbers of refugees from Caribbean, Asian and African nations, especially in Costa Rica, Honduras and Panama. The number of refugees in the five countries covered under this chapter totalled 27,145 at 31 March 1994: 24,862 in Costa Rica, 162 in El Salvador, 115 in Honduras, 1,031 in Nicaragua and 975 in Panama. The refugee population figure in Nicaragua fell from some 5,600 in 1993 to 1,031 in early 1994 following a careful review of the caseload by the Liaison Office in Managua. The current figure is believed to reflect more accurately the number of refugees present in the country. Approximately 22 per cent of the refugees in these countries are women and more than half are children. Most of the refugees of Central American origin are farmers living in rural areas, while refugees from other regions tend to settle in urban areas. At the end of 1993, some 9,855 refugees had obtained residence status in Costa Rica, and efforts are underway to promote similar measures in other countries of the region.

Programme objectives and priorities

3. In order to consolidate the significant achievements in identifying durable solutions in the region and to prevent future refugee flows, efforts will concentrate on increasing awareness of UNHCR's protection mandate, promoting respect for human rights and institution building. These efforts will include the promotion and support of mechanisms to allow refugees to obtain residence in countries of asylum, the establishment of refugee determination procedures in countries where they are still lacking, dissemination of information on human rights and the fundamental obligations of States, as well as the celebration of an international event in Costa Rica to reaffirm the protection principles embodied in the Cartagena Declaration.

Arrangements for implementation/related inputs

4. In Costa Rica, Consultores y Asesores Internacionales will implement project activities related to the local integration of refugees and provide legal counselling and follow-up on all legal aspects related to residency status of refugees in the country, while Rodríguez y Zamora SRL will administer arrangements with support staff to monitor the local integration process. In Panama, the UNHCR programme is implemented by the Government through its Ministry of Government and Justice, which in turn has delegated responsibility to the National Office for Refugees (ONPAR). In El Salvador, a local non-governmental organization (NGO), Asociación Salvadoreña de Apoyo Integral (ASAI), is UNHCR's main implementing partner for the provision of legal assistance to refugees, as well as for reintegration assistance to

returnees. ASAI also coordinates and supervises the implementation of quick impact projects (QIPs) being executed in 1994. Operations in Nicaragua and Honduras are covered by regional projects out of Costa Rica, with the National Refugee Office responsible for implementation in Nicaragua and the Honduran Red Cross in Honduras. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) makes international travel arrangments for refugees repatriating from countries in the region.

General Programmes

(a) Variations in planned activities in 1993

5. The promulgation in November 1992 of Executive Decree 21721-G allowing refugees to obtain residence status in Costa Rica encouraged UNHCR to address on their legal integration in 1993. A total of 9,855 refugees opted for residence prior to the expiration of the decree in November 1993. While significant, this number was far below the planning figure of 25,000. Following guidelines established by the Regional Office, the implementing agency carried out a thorough evaluation of all cases requiring health coverage in Costa Rica. This detailed assessment allowed for the reduction of beneficiaries within the health sector from 1,100 to 226 in 1993. The number of beneficiaries assisted in voluntary repatriation from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama proved to be somewhat less than originally planned, resulting in a corresponding reduction in requirements for the year.

(b) 1994 planned implementation

6. As durable solutions had been identified in previous years, material assistance provided to refugees through local settlement and repatriation programmes in Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama has been considerably reduced in 1994. Nevertheless, basic material support continues to be necessary for some 2,500 refugees in Costa Rica, 50 in El Salvador, 80 in Honduras, 200 in Nicaragua and 1,000 in Panama. Immediate attention will also be given to an estimated 700 new arrivals in these countries, with special attention for vulnerable refugees, especially female heads of household. Efforts to strengthen working relations with national institutions and NGOs will continue, in order to ensure adequate care for vulnerable groups.

7. Support for the voluntary repatriation of 898 refugees in the region has been planned in 1994: refugees are expected to repatriate to various countries from Costa Rica (470), El Salvador (50), Honduras (58), Nicaragua (200), and Panama (120).

8. A regional project designed to consolidate the durable solutions identified will commence in July 1994 and will pursue efforts to establish an early warning network in the region, promote human rights awareness and strengthen local institutions which will continue working with populations of concern to UNHCR.

(c) **1995 programme proposals**

Voluntary repatriation

9. As the region is more peaceful, it is expected that only 200 refugees will repatriate from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama during the year.

Local settlement

10. In 1995, refugees benefiting from subsistence grants, health coverage, legal protection and education are expected to number approximately 2,000 in Costa Rica, 220 in El Salvador, 90 in Honduras, 100 in Nicaragua and 1,000 in Panama. Of this total, approximately 60 per cent will be of Central American origin, and the remainder South American and other nationalities. It is expected that approximately 200 new arrivals will require immediate attention for a three-month period, and 50 vulnerable cases will continue to require a subsistence allowance pending a durable solution.

11. A regional project designed to promote preventive protection and consolidate the identification of durable solutions in the region will continue throughout 1995. The project will include activities designed to improve the awareness of international refugee law and human rights law; strengthen UNHCR's role as a catalyst for the promotion of rights of refugees, returnees, and other uprooted persons through dissemination of information on the fundamental obligations of States; establish a regional early warning network including the participation of United Nations agencies, government institutions and NGOs; establish refugee determination procedures in those countries still lacking such mechanisms (El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua); train government officials in the application of status determination procedures; and support mechanisms to allow for the obtention of residence status for refugees who choose to remain in Central American countries of asylum.

Special Programmes

Education Account

12. Education at university level will continue to be provided for approximately ten refugees, to facilitate their access to the labour market in Costa Rica.

Other Trust Funds

(a) **Variations in planned activities in 1993**

13. In Costa Rica, the repayment of loans extended in previous years allowed for some 500 beneficiaries to be granted credit for agricultural and small business activities in 1993. Important in-kind contributions from the Government of Costa Rica and various communities also allowed for the construction or repair of twelve additional schools in Costa Rica in the course of the year. In El Salvador, the introduction of QIPs in needy returnee communities and the expansion of documentation activities, especially through the opening of rural documentation centres, allowed UNHCR to play a

greater role than originally expected in alleviating poverty and supporting electoral processes in the country.

(b) **1994 planned implementation**

14. A total of 24 university students (20 in Costa Rica, two in Panama, one in Honduras and one in El Salvador) benefit from the German Albert Einstein Refugee Academic Initiative (DAFI) scholarship programme in 1994, the majority from Nicaragua, El Salvador, Peru and Haiti.

15. A letter of understanding signed by UNHCR, ILO, UNDP and the Government of Costa Rica in 1993 will allow for the continuation of productive credit schemes managed by UNHCR in Costa Rica during previous years by a joint credit committee. Some 1,700 refugee and local women will benefit from a project for the establishment of community-based child-care centres, the training of community workers and a scholarship programme for children.

16. In El Salvador, 32 QIPs will be implemented in nine needy returnee communities, with a special focus on enhancing the productive capacity of returnee women through the construction of day care centres, grinding mills and support for animal husbandry and small businesses. Documentation activities as described above will also continue to be supported until July 1994. Initial reintegration assistance will also be provided for an estimated 500 refugees expected to repatriate to the country during the year from various countries of asylum.

(c) **1995 planned implementation**

17. No special programmes are foreseen for 1995 in these countries.

Programme Delivery and Administrative Support Costs

(a) **Variations in planned activities in 1993**

18. Expenditure in the countries covered under this chapter was somewhat lower than revised 1993 estimates owing to lower staff costs. Activities were concluded more quickly than expected in Nicaragua, while in the region as a whole, two posts remained vacant for several months and common staff costs were also generally lower than budgeted.

(b) **1994 planned implementation**

19. Given the formal closure of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) process in May 1994, Joint Support Unit posts are being discontinued. Revised estimates for 1994 have decreased slightly from initial estimates with the post of Senior Durable Solutions Officer in Costa Rica discontinued six months early, effective 30 June 1994. As planned, one Programme Officer post and a Junior Professional Officer post in Costa Rica have been discontinued at mid-year.

20. Offices in Honduras and Nicaragua now operate with a National Officer, a secretary and a driver in each location. UNHCR relocated its Honduras office to UNDP premises at the beginning of the year, whereas similar plans in Nicaragua have been postponed.

21. In El Salvador, two General Service staff posts have been discontinued in the course of the year, while remaining posts have been extended.

(c) **1995 initial estimates**

22. In 1995, programme delivery and administrative support costs in the region are expected to decrease further, mostly due to the full-year effect of posts discontinued mid-1994.

23. In Honduras and Nicaragua, UNHCR will continue its presence with one National Officer and two local staff in each location.

24. With the phasing down of programmes in El Salvador, the UNHCR office will also be reducing in size. Although posts in El Salvador have been extended until the end of 1995, with the exception of a secretarial post which should be discontinued on 30 April 1995, other discontinuations may already prove possible in the course of the year.

UNHCR EXPENDITURE IN OTHER COUNTRIES IN CENTRAL AMERICA

(in thousands of United States dollars)

1993	1994			1995	
AMOUNT OBLIGATED	ALLOCATION APPROVED By 1993 EXCOM	PROPOSED REVISED ALLOCATION		SOURCE OF FUNDS AND TYPE OF ASSISTANCE	PROPOSED ALLOCATION/ PROJECTION
GENERAL PROGRAMMES (1)					
				VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION	
107.1	70.8	–	Honduras		–
784.4	960.8	779.6	Regional Project		465.3
180.0	–	–	Costa Rica		–
				LOCAL SETTLEMENT	
180.0 a/	–	–	Honduras		–
0.4 a/	–	–	Nicaragua		–
202.2	165.2	165.2	Panama		–
–	261.7	483.9	Regional Project		891.8
1,571.0	847.0	611.0	Costa Rica		–
1.5 a/	–	–	El Salvador		–
				RESETTLEMENT	
0.3 a/	–	–	Costa Rica		–
0.6 a/	–	–	El Salvador		–
1.5 a/	–	–	Honduras		–
3.2 a	–	–	Nicaragua		–
				PROGRAMME DELIVERY	
–	–	847.6	Costa Rica	See Annexes I a and II a	703.0
–	–	103.4	Nicaragua	See Annexes I a and II a	126.1
–	–	110.8	Honduras	See Annexes I a and II a	106.1
3,032.2	2,305.5	3,101.5		SUB-TOTAL OPERATIONS	2,292.3
				ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	
681.4	948.5	206.9	Costa Rica	See Annexes I b and II b	209.5
53.1	–	–	Honduras	See Annexes I b and II b	–
113.1	22.9	–	Nicaragua	See Annexes I b and II b	–
3,879.8	**3,276.9**	**3,308.4**		**TOTAL (1)**	**2,501.8**
SPECIAL PROGRAMMES (2)					
				EDUCATION ACCOUNT	
11.4	11.4	11.4	Costa Rica	10 university scholarships	11.4
2.8	–	–	Honduras		–
				OTHER TRUST FUNDS	
284.2	25.0	–	Nicaragua	QUICK IMPACT PROGRAMME	–
–	–	50.1	Regional Project		–
2,192.4	1,797.7	1,140.2	El Salvador	Assistance to returnees in El Salvador	–
1,528.6	347.5	348.5	Costa Rica	CIREFCA/PRODERE	–
156.8	–	–	Honduras		–
2.2	–	–	Panama		–
				PROGRAMME DELIVERY	
–	–	68.0	Costa Rica	See Annexes I a and II a	17.3
–	–	24.0	Nicaragua	See Annexes I a and II a	4.0
–	–	264.1	El Salvador	See Annexes I a and II a	268.2
				ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	
–	–	50.1	El Salvador	See Annexes I b and II b	49.8
149.4	161.1	137.0	El Salvador	Junior Professional Officer	137.0
61.8	64.0	–	Nicaragua	Junior Professional Officer	–
105.8	59.6	34.1	Costa Rica	Junior Professional Officer	34.1
4,495.4	**2,466.3**	**2,127.5**		**TOTAL (2)**	**521.8**
8,375.2	**5,743.2**	**5,435.9**		**GRAND TOTAL (1+2)**	**3,023.6**

a/ obligation incurred against Overall Allocation